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To actively and pleasurably involve children in a wide variety of literature, a teacher can follow a "World's Fair model" to broaden each child's language ability while guiding him through the genres. The child, encouraged to develop an "allocentric" mode of perception, extends himself as he might at a fair to take in new objects and information for self-satisfaction. The teacher is free to explore with his students new children's books and to develop a wide repertoire of teaching strategies which, like the various exhibits at the Fair, will challenge each child, bring him out of his inertia, and stimulate his thinking in depth. (JM)

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Teaching Literature in the Elementary School

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For best results children must approach literature with the same spirit of curiosity and wonder as they would view sights at a World's Fair.

AN "openness" of approach to the encounter with children's literature needs the expectancy and wonder that would be felt in taking a group of youngsters to the World's Fair. A "closed" approach is the teacher's looking out from a narrow frame of grade requirements at a stultifying maze of book shelves, with sixty new juveniles being added each week, even on weeks when there is no school, and feeling so overwhelmed that he or she assigns the same familiar titles and the same formula book reports, not venturing beyond the safe and tried books already read. It is a chewing-on-the-cud approach. In this "closed" world of the teacher's embeddedness with the familiar, the responses of the children tend, also, to fall neatly into further embeddedness-producing slots so expected in character that they can be perfunctorily translated into grades. When everything has been done the same way before, a teacher's question can secure a pupil's answer without its meaning going through the minds of either.

A "Model" for Wide-Reading

Even with its scope ever growing, the quality of literature-exploration becomes different once the model for viewing it is that of the World's Fair. The model admits the current knowledge explosion, erupting even into the children's field where three thousand new children's books are published each year, highlighted by five hundred reissues of "classics" in pyrotechnic fountains against the sky. But the model suggests an attitude for structuring this monumental quantity that takes away a sense of impotence before sheer massiveness. Part of the creative act of teaching is the making of "models" to help one convey both the spirit and the letter of what is taught. This model frees the reader of his reluctance and inertia by introducing the idea of holiday, of "play."

Schachtel points out, "Objects become distinct parts of experience only when they are encountered in a field sufficiently relaxed from need tension to permit the infant to approach and explore the object *playfully*—that is, without having to incorporate it as nourishment" (1, p. 270).

The model of the World's Fair autosuggests the concept of "play" and brings with it that most valuable of all learning incitements, a sense of anticipation. Instead of the pupil's sitting back in his accustomed groove and taking in what is passively in his immediate feeling environment, which Schachtel

named the "autocentric" mode of perception, he rises up and goes forth to a fair of multiform objects whose variety and geometric splendor he is coming out of himself to acknowledge. This seeing of what is outside the self is what Schachtel named the object-centered or "allocentric" mode of perception. In this mode, the eyes reach out to take in what is unique about each object, independent of its use for the viewer or its pragmatic value. The ears reach out to listen to a story, not in order to pass a test on it, but to discover what it is in itself.

The "Autocentric" Mode

A child reads a recipe in the autocentric mode to determine what ingredients she'll need "for" what she is cooking. Or in the same mode, she reads assigned chapters "for" a high mark in a test. If she reads a story or poem "for" its specific use for her, in order to memorize character names and plot facts for a book report or test, or in order to know more about a geographical area, or to join the in-group who have read it, then she is subject-oriented in her approach to literature and is using the autocentric mode that confirms her in her embeddedness. There is nothing more inert than a young fossil. A classroom full of polished museum pieces may seem to need little more than dusting—and appear impossible to stimulate, unless the teacher is willing to create the model that will invite a spirit of inquiry.

The "fair" model provides an image of going forth, which is a necessary internalization of moving out of primary embeddedness (that safe, protected, inactive state where everything is labeled) to reach out creatively into the unknown. The "fair" model posits an otherness, which must be met.

This otherness offers a direct challenge to the vagueness that evaporates content for so many of the disadvantaged children in the inner-city schools. In order to insulate themselves during their captive hours in school from remembering the threat of shifting parental relationships and street strife, such children accept the uninspired teacher because acceptance helps them pull the blanket of the familiar over their heads each day in school. Whatever can be meagerly incorporated into this closed world, they will take. Embedded only in a feeling awareness, they tend to resist what can be apprehended as an object with implications that appear outside their immediate needs to pass a test.

A teacher tends to interpret these as poor readers, attributing their deficit to their previous teacher's ineptness or to the deprivation of their inner-city backgrounds. Such interpretation, is, of course, rationalizing, inventing facile excuses to cover up the teacher's own shortcomings and weaknesses.

The real problem is that the teacher has failed in her teaching to create through her own raptness in the object (the story or poem) a variety of magnets for drawing the child out of his embeddedness (that state where he knows the formulas, the answers) into a daring encounter with an aspect of reality. The teacher needs a variety of magnets because children have different learning styles, different arousal points. She must develop over a period of trial and error, a wide repertoire of teaching strategies, each designed for shaking up what has disastrously begun to settle into routine. She must ask herself: "Is what I am going to do today going to

develop inquiring minds? Or is it going to fossilize knowledge?"

Separation Painful

To be asked to think within a new frame of reference is not easy, for it separates one from that niche where one had already begun to calcify around the edges. Settling back into a depression that preserves them from the shocks of changes, adults, too, tend to pull the blanket of the familiar over their heads where they breathe back in their own thoughts. Bennett Cerf, the president of Random House, observed to Mayor John Lindsey over television that in his publishing experience he found that people tended to buy only those books with whose tenets they agreed, with the result that the "doves" bought only those books with the "dove" viewpoint and the "hawks" only those with the "hawks." To be separated from prejudice is painful.

If adults hold frenetically to secondary sub-group embeddedness, children's obduracy in doing so provides the greatest challenge to the teacher. If adults won't go forth to another viewpoint, how may teachers act as Pied Pipers to lead children out of their cocoons?

The Art of Teaching

With inner-city children, it is not a sub-average intelligence which contracts their world, but rather their world which constricts the growing of their intelligence. They hold to the words and patterns they already know so as not to disturb the equilibrium they have won in relation to their environment. Every new word learned means a new frame of reference. Not to increase their vocabularies is to encourage them to settle back into the patterns they have hollowed out for themselves.

It is the art of the teacher to induce them to separate themselves from this embeddedness and brave the remaking of themselves in an encounter with literature. The teacher does not betray the children of the inner-city by leading them on with the promise of "magic joy"—that elixir that a person daydreams of getting through no effort of his own. In such short-lived "magic joy," children have no awareness of moving forward, but are force-fed, popped from one cocoon into another. They breathe none of the savoring of freedom that comes from a *prepared* openness to the challenges posed by encounters with different genres.

The Allocentric Mode

A child finds true joy in using his senses, as he would his hands, to reach out to an object. In the allocentric mode, hearing goes out from self-absorption to take in what is being said, and seeing goes out from the self to take in the actual dimensions of "the other." It is this mode which operates in a child's relating himself to literature. He cannot stay put. He has to go out to "the other" in the book he reads or that he hears read to him. His greatest joy lies in such active use of his senses in investigating a real object outside his subjective world. In literature, he learns how to relate to the unpredictable other. In learning how to affirm "the other" in all his difference and strangeness, in actively turning toward an object in literature outside himself and viewing it as it is in itself independent of its role for self-gratification—in this is true joy.

Only when the child's mind is relaxed and not under pressure to produce an immediate solution can he afford to view an object from every possible tentative angle. To do this he needs time. He must have the chance to rehear, to reread a story—not once but as often as he needs in order to discover what is unique and alive in it. Its aliveness is caught under skeins that only frequent rereadings will pull apart and expose. So does an adult go back time and again to a poem until the meaning that is locked into each stanza walks out to him. Meaning is the sleeping princess that only the kiss of attention will awake.

Only play permits the recognition of an object world. Need chops off all those aspects of objects except that narrow slice that fits expediency. Students studying for a test resist learning anything except the narrow slice on which they are to be tested. The model of the World's Fair imbues teacher and student alike with the concept of play in relation to the going forth to multiform objects.

No poet could write a poem about a familiar object unless he forced himself to look at it long enough until he discovered what was strange about it. Children, too, can be taught to look at familiar objects around them until they actually "see" them—as a poet would. The modern trend in mathematics is to get children to think as mathematicians; in science, to think as scientists. In the humanities, the task is to get children to think as poets, *i.e.*, to think as wordmasters who are always engaged in the out-going task of trying to close the gap between what they see and the words they need to recreate what they see. In order to do this, children need a constant in-put of new words, with the teacher's using a word in her own speaking a dozen different ways to alert children to its possibilities.

Next, children have to be taught how to let fall from them their preconceptions about things around them and to look with relaxed attention at a bunch of colored chalk or a map slightly awry on the wall. They have to learn to look past all the clichés ever used to describe what they are looking at until this one thing stands out in all the facets of its uniqueness for them.

A model for this kind of looking is provided by a recent masterpiece for children, George Abbe's *The Larks* (2). In this book, told in the first person, each day the author goes out from himself to watch some new phase of the larks' interpersonal life, even sitting on the road at dusk to discover in the silence of waiting how the lark ruffles up a bit of dirt to make a precarious bed on the ground. This going out of the self to absorb one's attention in getting to know an object as it is, apart from its need-aspect for one, its practical use as prey or food, is exercising allocentric perception, which Schachtel rates as the highest form of perception reached in man's phylogenetic development.

In reading *The Larks,* children are called out from their undifferentiated way of looking at birds to look sharply at larks as they really are if one took time to know them so well that one is no longer the same person after this venture beyond the periphery of one's existence. A teacher who leads children through the moving experience of *The Larks,* living it with them, has a *vif* life tool for asking: "How much would you see if you looked as long and as intently at some one thing as this author did? Would you see something even

more striking if you looked at it again tomorrow? Do you think if you kept looking, with a piece of paper in your pocket on which to jot ideas down, you might see something in it that no one in the world has yet seen?" This is the beginning of a child's sense of discovery. It is the dawning of the sense of his own uniqueness—because only he *saw* it!

Guideposts

The World's Fair aspect of children's literature is structured for the teacher by anthologies that hold pavilions with contributions from countries and cultures throughout the world. A guide such as Charlotte S. Huck's and Doris Y. Kuhn's updated survey (3), replete with techniques for guiding children through the genres, is necessary if the teacher is to do justice to the amplitude of the festival.

Collections of poetry hint the magnitude of the fair grounds. But children need to pore through slim volumes of verse by individual poets; such as the recent piquant one by Leland B. Jacobs, *Is Somewhere Always Far Away?* (4) or the amusing, tantalizing one he wrote just before that, *Just Around the Corner* (5). Reading these, children step from stone to stone in the one brook they are getting to know—going from poem to poem looking through the eyes of the one poet whose voice is slowly becoming familiar to their ears.

Or teachers can share with children a trip that Joan Bodger took to the sources and backgrounds of children's books in England, which she recounted in *How the Heather Looks* (6). Or reading from a collection like *Flowers of Delight* (7), teachers can give them a taste of the virile and surprising literature that children read two centuries ago.

If teachers want to overcome what Arno Bellack in his book, *The Language of the Classroom*, calls "the classroom law of inertia," that goose-step procedure where each teaching cycle tends to have the same characteristics as the preceding one, they may ask themselves if this sameness is due to his research finding that in the give and take between teacher and pupil, there was "rarely any discussion of the logic of the material . . . and rarely any discussion of language mechanics. The view that logic and the use of language are taught in every class is certainly not supported by the data" (8, p. 77). Bellack found that remarks about persons, logic, physical actions, cognitive and emotional behaviors, and language mechanics took up only one-half of one per cent of the classroom discourses in any of the fifteen classes that he studied.

Yet language is the cane, so to speak, that the child reaches out from the undifferentiated vagueness that envelops him in order to explore the real object outside him. If he hasn't any language for coping with it, for naming it and the qualities that differentiate it, then

he tends to withdraw into an aquaeous, non-logical state. The reason children forget much of what they encounter is that they haven't the language for storing it, let alone the precise words for retrieving it.

Yet words (and what they stand for) are the warp and woof of literature. What rubs Aladdin's Lamp and makes it glow in the dark is the right word. What the inner-city children need moment by moment is the "Open Sesame" of language. They will get language if the teacher counts not on the home or the streets to give it to them, but ineluctably on his teaching art. Each moment is the "Now," the acceptable moment, for giving to children a new word, alive with relevance.

Through the triple modalities of hearing, speaking, and seeing, children internalize a new word. Each new word then acts within them as a magnet to enable them to reach out to the growth-inducing attractiveness of the magnetic "other" in literature.

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